

Details support for past preservation, the development of solutions for present challenges, and securing these national treasures for the future

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WASHINGTON, DC – Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07), although unable to attend due to Congressional voting obligations, issued a statement (below) for the *America’s Great Outdoors Initiative’s* public listening session at Independence Mall. The Congressman sent two members of his staff to continue his effort to engage with citizens in the discussion of historic preservation and its relationship to conservation, recreation, and reconnecting Americans to the great outdoors.

“The National Park Service must balance the timeless treasures of our nation with the needs of modern Americans,” said Congressman Sestak. “Our National Parks provide adults and children access to the outdoors and windows into our history and culture. Every American has the right to experience enjoyment, education, and inspiration at these sites and it is critical that their voices are heard in determining a vision for the National Park System in the 21st Century.”

Congressman Sestak is a member of the Land Conservation Caucus and has received a 97% rating from the League of Conservation Voters. He has strongly supported legislation designed to protect and preserve our natural and cultural heritage for future generations. In addition, the Congressman has worked closely with Valley Forge National Historic Park (VFNHP) and the Friends of VFNHP to secure over \$1 million in federal funding to rehabilitate two buildings at the park’s Welcome Center, so as to help park visitors understand the historical importance of the park and to improve visitors’ overall experience.

Statement from Congressman Joe Sestak:

I would like to thank the current Administration for providing Americans the opportunity to affirm their support of our national parks and historic places, and to participate in planning for the future of these precious resources. I regret that I am not able to be in attendance, as I am voting in Washington DC; however, I would like to extend my warmest appreciation to those here today for their contributions. You are demonstrating the highest standards of active citizenship.

The listening session in Philadelphia today focuses on historic preservation. Although many iconic natural vistas define American’s image of their natural parks, these historic sites, particularly those in Pennsylvania, showcase our nation’s rich cultural history. Encouraging children to explore the foundation of our democracy is central to America’s capacity for global leadership and I commend projects that seek to bring teachers into the National Park System, such as the Teacher-Ranger-Teacher program, as well as engage youth outside of the classroom.

As we approach the Centennial of the National Park System, I also trust that our nation will make use of this unique opportunity to support these priceless sites, as well as celebrate them. This will ensure that we pass on one of our greatest inheritances as Americans to future generations, while also continuing to create needed jobs in land management, conservation, recreation, tourism, and related fields and industries.

The National Park Service (NPS) must retain the flexibility to make decisions about how to best preserve and restore our natural and historical resources. Initiatives like the "Challenge Cost Share Program" and the use of the NPS leasing authority are valuable tools for parks looking for methods to address immediate concerns regarding the integrity of their site, build relationships with other partners, and maximize the resources available to the NPS to achieve its missions. In conjunction, our national treasures also need strong commitments from federal resources, such as the Land and Water Conservation Fund, to develop long-term strategic plans that avert urgent and, ultimately, potentially more expensive crises.

Moreover, as the problems of deferred maintenance combine with the pressing impacts of 21st century challenges, such as adapting to the impact of climate change, I recommend that sites share their most successful management practices in a systemized way, so that ideas that bring about the most efficient and innovative utilization of funds are not limited to a single site.

I have hosted 50 summits, resource fairs, townhall meetings, and networking events in my District over the course of my three years in office and understand how powerful ideas can affect positive change when there is communication between coalitions, stakeholders, and citizens.

I am proud to work with Superintendent Mike Caldwell of Valley Forge National Historic Park (VFNHP), Superintendent Bob Kirby of Gettysburg National Military Park, and Superintendent Cynthia MacLeod of Independence National Historical Park (INHP), while recognizing those who contribute to the development of the American Revolution Center at INHP, and Cinda Waldbuesser, Program Manager of the Philadelphia Field Office of the National Parks Conservation Association. Collectively, this partnership of government, private, and non-profit entities makes the Greater Delaware Valley a special place to live and reflects the very best of our national spirit.

Do not hesitate to inform your elected officials, as well as the agencies present, how we can best assist in the development of a conservation agenda worthy of the 21st Century.

Thank you for your partnership.

Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of “Deep Blue,” the Navy’s anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the “Global War on Terrorism.” He served as President Clinton’s Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from

Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. Congress.